

A Distinctive German-American Credo: The United Brethren Confession of Faith

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Among the "landmark documents" of the United Methodist Church is the *Confession of Faith* of the former Evangelical United Brethren Church. The historical antecedents to that *Confession* were the *Confession of Faith* of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ and the *Articles of Faith* of the Evangelical Church, which were rewritten to produce the new *Confession* in 1962. The 1962 *Confession* shows its indebtedness to that of the former United Brethren both in its title and in the use of specific phrases which were characteristic of the older *Confession*.¹

The earlier document, which was officially promulgated at the United Brethren General Conference of 1815, has not been the subject of historical and theological analysis since the era of nineteenth-century denominational historiography. The historians of that era were in accord in their intention to show the uniqueness of the *Confession*, but their conclusions were at times either misleading or not fully explicated.²

An examination of the old United Brethren Confession of Faith brings to light a long-obscure perception of the Christian faith which in its early setting had direct and living ties with the deeply personal witness of its adherents. How this document became progressively "stereotyped" and made more distant from the living faith of the "Brotherhood" is a concern subsequent to the question under focus. This first concern is to discern what made the early Confession of Faith of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ a distinctive German-American credo, one which added its own distinctive elements to the emerging pattern of American evangelical Protestantism.

In reconstructing this confessional tradition, attention will be given to its historical context, its form and function, and to the alteration of the Confession which occurred in the first half century of its existence.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE POST-REVOLUTIONARY ERA

Henry Spayth, one of the earliest historians of the United Brethren, asserted without supporting evidence that the *Confession* was written by Philip William Otterbein for use in his Baltimore congregation, the Evangelical Reformed Church of Baltimore, and that this document, along with Otterbein's *Constitution*

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and *Ordinances* of 1785, was the one adopted as the credo of the nascent movement at its meeting in Otterbein's Baltimore parsonage in 1789.³

In the 1814 manuscript version of the *Confession* one finds the primitive form for the document that was officially adopted by the first General Conference of the church in 1815. A comparison of the two brings to light differences which indicate that the distinctively Reformed-Pietistic character of the document was being eroded. In its place, denominational consciousness was emerging, and the amended forms of the *Confession* from 1815 onward increasingly show the tendency of the United Brethren movement to become gradually assimilated into the mainstream of American evangelical Protestantism.

The historical milieu of the German *Aufklärung* in which the *Confession* appeared provides a perspective for assessing its distinctiveness. In Germany, the established territorial church orders (*Kirchenordnungen*) were frequently being overturned in favor of universalistic credos asserting a secularized "rights of man" ideology.⁴ The venerable *Heidelberg Catechism*, which had assumed a confessional status among the German and Dutch Reformed in the era of Protestant orthodoxy,⁵ was less frequently being expounded after 1700 in pulpit and school. Georg Gottfried Otterbein (1731-1800), a brother of William and a pastor in Duisburg, Germany, published sermons and primers on the *Catechism* which were used extensively in those homes of Germany and the American Middle Colonies where streams of Reformed Pietism kept alive a witness to the Christian faith when it was elsewhere being eroded.⁶ By invigorating a theologically-informed, popular piety in a period of marked religious decline, the Otterbeins contributed to the evangelical wing of the German Reformed Church and helped to provide a basis within that tradition for the "unsectarian" (*unparteiisch*) United Brotherhood movement to emerge.⁷

This milieu points to several distinctives which may be claimed for the *Confession*. It exists as one of the first post-Revolutionary War credos to be developed by an American religious body, and it was contemporary with that period of United Brethren history when Otterbein was its guiding influence. Second, it emerged from a quite different environment than the sixteenth-century confessions to which the great "confessional" church bodies, the Lutheran and the Reformed, remain committed. Unlike these, the United Brethren *Confession* was the expression of a lay, revivalistic movement that was admittedly unsectarian and less polemical in tenor. While the Reformation confessions contained strongly polemical articles that were anti-Roman, anti-Anabaptist, and occasionally anti-Lutheran or anti-Calvinist, as the case may be, the only polemical tone in the United Brethren *Confession* was its implicit critique of the godlessness of the Enlightenment Age. Its distinctive status as an unsectarian rallying point for all "awakened" German-Americans of differing traditions was obscured as it became the official credo of a new American denomination. Third, the United Brethren *Confession* is distinctive as an eighteenth-century response to the divisive, sectarian ferment that was a characteristic of the German-American culture.⁸ The other major proposal to unify these divergent voices upon a new confessional basis was that of the Moravian leader, Count Zinzendorf. In the 1740s he proposed the

formation in Pennsylvania of the semi-ecclesiastical "Congregation of God in the Spirit," that was intended to supersede all other church traditions and would fuse a highly subjective piety focusing upon Christ's passion with a rigorous, hierarchical organization. Only a few ministers remained fitfully committed to this ideal during this decade.⁹ Otterbein arrived in Pennsylvania in 1752, during the eclipse of this abortive effort. The movement which came to be associated with him reflected both his sense of churchmanship as a Reformed pastor and his conviction that awakened believers may participate in a "higher unity" in the Spirit without sacrificing their responsibilities to their historic churches. This outlook is first reflected in the records of his "Pipe Creek Conferences" (1774-1776) with fellow Reformed pastors of evangelical persuasion and later in the United Brethren movement, which included a significant number of Mennonite participants.¹⁰ For Otterbein, the millennial kingdom would be a divinely-initiated "more glorious state" within the future of the church in history.¹¹ It was the United Brethren *Confession of Faith* that gave concrete form to that hope.

FORM AND FUNCTION IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The following is the text of the 1814 manuscript version of the United Brethren *Confession of Faith*, with an accompanying English translation by this author.¹²

Die Lehre der Vereinigten Bruder in Christo

Artikel 1. Im Namen Gottes bekennen wir vor Jedermann, dass wir glauben an den Einigen wahren Gott, Vater, Sohn und heiligen Geist, dass diese drey Eins sind, der Vater in Sohn, der Sohn in Vater, und der heilige Geist gleiches Wesen, mit beiden, dass dieser Gott, Himmel und Erden, and alles was darinnen ist, sowohl sichtbar als unsichtbar, erschaffen hat, und alles traget, regiret, schitzet and erhält.

Art. 2. Wir glauben an Jesum Christum dass er wahrer Gott und Mensch, Heiland und Versohner, der ganzen Welt ist, dass alle Menschen durch ihn seelig werden können, wenn sie wollen, das dieser Jesus, für uns gelitten, gestorben und begraben, am dritten tage wider auferstanden, gen Himmel

The Teaching of the United Brethren in Christ

Art. 1. In the name of God we confess before every man, that we believe in the only true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that these three are one, the Father in the Son, the Son in the Father, and the Holy Spirit of the same essence with both; that this God created heaven and earth and everything which is within them, visible as well as invisible, and he sustains, governs, protects and supports them.

Art. 2. We believe in Jesus Christ; that He is true God and true man and the Savior and Mediator of the whole world; that all men can become blessed through Him if they will; that this Jesus suffered and died and was buried for us, and rose on the third day, ascended into heaven, and will

gefahren, und am jüngsten tage, wieder kommen wird, zu richten die lebendigen und die toden.

Art. 3. Wir glauben an den heiligen Geist, das er vom Vater und Sohn ausgehe, dass wir durch ihn müssen geheiligt werden, und den glauben erlangen, welcher uns reiniget von Aller befleckung des fleisches und des geistes.

Art. 4. Wir glauben das die Bibel Gottes Wort ist, dass sie den wahren weg zu unserm seelenheil und seligkeit enthalte, das ein jeder wahrer Christ, dieselbe, mit den einflüssen des geistes-Gott, Einzig und allein zu seiner richtschnur nehmen müsse, und das ohne buse und glauben, an Jesum Christum vergebung der sünden, und nachfolge Jesu Christi, niemand ein wahrer Christ seyn kann.

Art. 5. Wir glauben das die Lehre, welche die heilige Schrift enthält, nämlich der Fall in Adam, und die errettung durch Jesum Christum der ganzen Welt geprediget und verkündiget werden sollte. Aeussere Zeichen und verordnungen, nämlich die taufe, und das gedächtnis des Herrn, in austheilung des brods und Weins, werden anempfohlen, wie auch das fusswaschen, wo es begehret wird.

come again on the last day to judge the living and the dead.

Art. 3. We believe in the Holy Spirit; that He proceeds from the Father and the Son; that we must become blessed through Him and attain unto the faith which cleanses us from all blemishes of the flesh and of the spirit.

Art. 4. We believe that the Bible is God's Word; that it contains the true way to our spiritual welfare and happiness; that every true Christian might receive it with the influence of the Spirit of God singly and solely as his guideline (lit. "plumbline"); and that without repentance and faith, without the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ, and without following after Jesus Christ, no one can be a true Christian.

Art. 5. We believe that the teaching which the holy Scripture contains; namely, the fall in Adam and the deliverance through Jesus Christ should be proclaimed and made known throughout the entire world. The outward signs and ordinances, namely baptism and the remembrance of the Lord in the distribution of the bread and wine, we will recommend, as also the washing of feet, where it is desired.

It is evident that this *Confession*, with its grammatical errors, reproduces the basic form of the Apostles' Creed with the addition of a paragraph on the Bible and one on the "outward means of grace."

As for its more immediate historical antecedents, the *Confession* bears some resemblance to the Anabaptist credos, of which the *Schleitheim Confession* (1527) of the Swiss Brethren is the most notable. Like the latter, it is marked by a non-scholastic, lay-oriented simplicity, with emphasis upon the ethical demands of the faith, explained in terms of "following after Christ" (*Nachfolge Christi*). Implicit in its teaching is a doctrine of two worlds, the fallen, coercive *corpus*

Christianum, and the gathered, eschatological community of the redeemed. The believer is the one who forsakes the former (in *Absonderung*) and obediently presses into the Age of the Kingdom, whose first fruits are to be discovered within the bounds of the believers' fellowship.¹³

Although the only explicit reference to Anabaptist teaching is in the final statement which permits different modes of baptism¹⁴ and recognizes the practice of footwashing, there are other parts which reflect some commonality with the Anabaptist credo. For example, the *Confession* links "forgiveness of sins" (*Vergebung*) with "following after Christ" (*Nachfolge Christi*), as a clear indication that there is to be no one-sided, antinomian stress on justification without sanctification. For the Anabaptist, his credo was a witness which was to be personally lived out in the midst of a fallen, hostile society. Is there not an echo of this legacy when the *Confession* affirms "...that every true Christian is bound to receive it as his only guideline," or again, "Christ shall be preached and *made known* throughout the whole world" (*italics mine*)?¹⁵

The most likely link with Anabaptism is provided by Martin Boehm (1725-1812) and other former Mennonites, notably Christian Newcomer (1750-1830), who participated in the United Brotherhood movement after 1789.¹⁶ These men were also guaranteed full participation in the life of Otterbein's Baltimore congregation by virtue of the church constitution which he implemented in 1785.¹⁷ Newcomer was willing to baptize children, while Boehm was not, and in his *Journal* he recorded that the washing of feet was practiced in connection with the Lord's Supper at the first General Conference in 1815.¹⁸ The 1833 General Conference enacted a rule that retained the Mennonite opposition to the swearing of oaths, although it was not included in the *Confession of Faith*¹⁹. The provision "against the world" was interpreted by Mennonites to be a mandate to continue the wearing of simple attire.²⁰ One of the few existing documents reflecting the critical stance taken by conservative Mennonites toward the revivalist preachers is a book by the Mennonite Bishop Christian Burkholder of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, entitled *Nützliche und erbauliche Anreds an die Jugend, von der wahren Busse* ("A Useful and Edifying Discourse to the Young on True Repentance," according to the English edition of 1857).²¹ He upholds discipleship ethics against the revivalists' emphasis upon emotional experience, saying, "My experience can help you nothing, nor can your experience help me anything." Rather, says Burkholder, "Christ identifies the new birth with the following of Him . . . A follower of Christ is in his whole course of life a light of the world and salt to the earth . . ."²² As we have seen, the *Confession* balances an emphasis upon a conscious awareness of repentance and faith (*Busse und Glauben*) with a recognition of the need for "following after Jesus Christ" (*nachfolge Jesu Christi*).²³ Yet, it may be that, in practice, many United Brethren gave less attention to the ethical implications of *Nachfolge* than to the conscious experience of the penitential struggle (*Busskampf*) and rebirth (*Wiedergeburt*).

Another historical antecedent to the *Confession* which gives a somewhat different perspective to its distinctiveness is the *Confession of Faith of the Czech Brethren* of 1535 (The Bohemian *Unitas Fratrum*), which was reprinted and given

new life by John Amos Comenius (1592-1670), the most celebrated Moravian scholar.²⁴ Comenius reconstituted the Czech Brethren and worked toward the dawn of a millennial kingdom which would supersede the fallen, coercive era of his own day. There is here no direct, personal link, as in the case of Boehm and Otterbein, but both traditions share in part a common historico-theological rootage that has been insufficiently noticed. Only Lawrence, an early historian of the United Brethren in Christ, suggested that the work of Comenius be regarded as a precursor to the movement associated with Otterbein.²⁵ However, Lawrence was also preoccupied with a denominational polemic with contemporary German Reformed historians.²⁶ His intention was to establish the preeminence of his denomination by showing how, in spirit, it was in the line of succession to the "righteous remnant" in Christian history—from the Waldensians and the Hussites to the reconstituted *Unitas Fratrum* under Comenius and then Zinzendorf. A closer examination of Comenius reveals that his work in restoring the confessional unity of the Czech Brethren was the direct product of his theological education which he received at the Herborn Gymnasium in Nassau, the noted Reformed school where Otterbein and his brothers studied and lectured a century later.²⁷ From the days of the great Johann Alsted (1588-1638), who was Comenius' teacher, to the time of the Otterbeins, Herborn was known throughout Europe as a center for non-scholastic, irenical Protestantism. It was here that both men acquired a taste for learning that was to be integrally related to the practice of the Christian life. Comenius published *A Manual, or the Kernel of the Holy Scriptures* which was to serve a similar pedagogical function for the Czech Brethren that the *Lehre* ("Teaching"), which later became the *Confession* of the Otterbein movement, served.²⁸ It was also at Herborn that both men received a vision of the worldwide mission of the church which prompted them to embark on divergent missionary careers.²⁹ Finally, the reordering of creation which Comenius had in view—church unity, world freedom and the conversion of the globe through the enveloping mission of the gospel—might also characterize the early outlook of the Otterbein movement. The *Confession* speaks of the possible salvation "of the whole world" (Article 2), of God's graceful intention "that all men can become blessed through [Christ], if they will," and of the goal that there is to be made manifest "one holy church" (*eine heilige Gemeinde*).³⁰ In this vein, Otterbein frequently implored that the Brotherhood be careful to remain unpartisan (*unparteiische*).³¹

To summarize, the form of the *Confession* is noted for its simplicity, brevity and capacity to reach quickly the marrow of Reformed Pietistic theology with a narrative and even poetic deftness. To this is joined an array of Anabaptist themes which is interwoven to produce a unified statement. In function, the *Confession* intended to assist the earnest pilgrim on the way of salvation (*Heilweg*) in "making his calling and election sure"³² amid a hostile world of Enlightenment secularism on the one side and sterile theological orthodoxy, on the other.

THE ALTERATION OF THE CONFESSION

An indication of the manner in which the self-identity of the United Brethren in

Christ was being altered in its early, formative years is to observe the way in which its *Confession* was amended. The earliest version reflects most closely the unique blending of themes from classical Reformed Pietism with Mennonite elements, which was first symbolized by the personal meeting of Otterbein and Boehm. These themes are gradually obscured as changes and additions begin to take place as early as 1815, when the general conference of the new denomination placed it at the front of its first published *Discipline*. What were these changes?

First, the earliest edition, entitled the "*Teaching (Lehre) of the United Brethren in Christ*" was changed in 1815 to the *Confession of Faith (Glaubens-Bekenntniss)*. The former term was the one used by Otterbein in the *Constitution and Ordinances* for his Baltimore congregation, when he wrote that the pastor shall "*impart instruction (Lehre)*" to the youth (Rule 8) and that he "shall make it one of his highest duties to watch over the rising youth, diligently instructing them in the principles of religion, according to the Word of God (Rule 9)."³³ The new term gave the document the preeminence befitting its new status as the official symbol of an ecclesiastical body, although the word "church" is not yet included in the title of the denomination. The arrangement of the pre-1815 version into five articles emphasized its function to provide points of instruction in the faith, after the manner specified in Otterbein's church order.

Second, the object of Christ's saving activity was changed from "the whole world" ("*der ganzen Welt*," in the early text) to "the whole human race" ("*des ganzen menschlichen Geschlechts*," 1815). The earlier formulation allows for a more comprehensive view of salvation which could rightly be seen to include nature as well as history. Here is a theme found in Paul in Romans 8:22f and in Ephesians 1:10 and, more directly, it had been extensively developed in the "federal" theology of Friedrich A. Lampe (1683-1729), which Otterbein had studied at Herborn.³⁴ The close correlation which Lampe maintained between the redemptive Word and nature and history is illustrated in this citation from his important work, *The Secret of the Covenant of Grace (Geheimnis des Gnadenbundes)*: "Since new discoveries in nature are daily being made through field glasses, what is it to wonder that new discoveries are also taking place through the increasing diligence in the examination of the godly Word, and the promised growth in knowledge in the last times is always being further enhanced toward fulfillment."³⁵

A third strategic change which occurred in this article alters the expression of the human response in the covenant of grace. In line with Reformed Pietism, the early version tells us that the goal of Christ's saving work is the creation of new moral beings who are "*seelig*" or controlled by an inclination of heart through the action of the Divine Spirit.³⁶ This term was eliminated in 1815, and the new formulation merely emphasizes the need for our free acceptance of Christ's grace, in Arminian fashion, but without reference to the quality of life which results.³⁷ Article Three, which concerns the Holy Spirit, was likewise altered in 1815 so as to diminish somewhat the emphasis upon a complete spiritual and moral transformation as the goal of salvation. This change appears to reflect the growing influence in the Brotherhood of former Mennonites, for whom the theme of Christian

perfection was less significant than it had been for Otterbein, whose treatment of the theme reflected Reformed Pietist rather than Methodist influence. The earliest text simply expressed that "We *must* become holy through the Spirit," and that we "will attain unto the faith which purifies us from all blemishes of the flesh and of the spirit."³⁸ In 1815, this clause was stricken and in its place appeared the following: "that through Him we are enlightened, justified through faith, and we become holy (or sanctified)."³⁹

Fourth, in 1815, this new article was inserted following the affirmation concerning the Holy Spirit: "We believe in a godly communion, (*Gemeinde*), the fellowship of the godly, the resurrection of the body, and a life everlasting."⁴⁰ This addition from the Apostles' Creed reflects the emerging ecclesiastical self-awareness of the fledgling spiritual brotherhood. While *Gemeinde* was translated "church" in the English edition of 1819, the German context denotes a spiritual *koinonia* rather than church in the externalized sense, as in *Kirche*.

The next article in the early *Confession* is devoted to the Bible and the final one to the essence of its teaching. It says that the Bible "contains the true way to our spiritual welfare and happiness." Scripture functions here in a hermeneutical sense as the path for the pilgrim to follow through the labyrinth of early life *en route* to God's Kingdom. This outlook is reminiscent of the *Heilweg* methodology of the Reformed Pietists, who discerned in Scripture, with the help of their *Heidelberg Catechism*, a precisely-structured guide—sometimes referred to as a "ladder to heaven" (*Himmelsleiter*)—which every earnest believer is in the process of ascending. "The Bible is the source," wrote Georg Otterbein, "and the *Catechism* points out the order which is derived from this source."⁴¹ Referring to this "order of salvation," he exclaimed, "How beautiful it is to learn to know the order itself, ... what we originally were, what we have become through the fall, and what we shall again become through the fully gracious design of God."⁴² In this tradition, the pastor's task is not so much the proclamation of the Word as a *fait accompli*; rather, it is to function as a spiritual counselor who escorts his pilgrims through the steps of the order of salvation according to the readiness for discernment that they manifest. It was in this vein that Johann Daniel Otterbein (1736-1804), the brother who was pastor of the parish of Berleburg, published a narrative of his counseling sessions with a condemned murderer.⁴³ It was from this perspective that Georg Otterbein, pastor at Duisburg, published a primer on the *Catechism* that was used both by the German Reformed and by the earliest United Brethren in this country.⁴⁴ It was also in this vein that William Otterbein instituted his rules for examining communicants at his Reformed parish in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, to ascertain their readiness for participation in the Lord's Supper.⁴⁵ This theme is further developed when, in the next line, the *Confession* affirms that "every true Christian is bound to receive it with the influences of the Spirit of God, purely and simply as his only guideline (*Richtschnur*)...." The 1819 English translation renders *Richtschnur* in a more legalistic context as a "rule." This affirmation of the role of Scripture was retained by subsequent revisions, including the major one of 1889.⁴⁶

Finally, the statement in Article Five, concerning the sacraments, was made

into a separate article beginning in 1815. Actually, the word "sacrament" is not used. Instead, reference is made to the "outer signs (or testimonies) and ordinances" ("*Aeussere Zeichen und verordnungen*"), which designates the sacraments not as objective means of grace, or "converting" ordinances, but rather as public signs of the presence of saving grace within the reborn believer. The 1815 revision of the *Confession* strengthened the place of the sacraments in the life of the Brotherhood. Whereas the earliest statement had said that the ordinances are "recommended," the subsequent statements all say "they *shall* be used according to the example of the Lord Jesus among His children."⁴⁷ However, it was also added that "the mode and manner should be left to each one according to his judgment." In addition, the 1815 revision replaced "outer testimonies and ordinances" with the "outer means of grace"—an indication of the apparent rise of more traditional sacramental theology befitting a movement that was now acquiring a conscious churchly status. Similarly, subsequent revisions of this last article indicate that the practice of foot washing was also becoming less important.⁴⁸

SOME CONCLUDING PERSPECTIVES ON THE UNIQUENESS OF THE CONFESSION

The document which we have examined is a major product of a little-investigated but formative tradition in American religious life that emerged from the interaction of the "Pennsylvania Dutch" culture with the revivalism rooted in the Great Awakening. It was conceived in an irenic milieu of Reformed and Mennonite spirituality that is perhaps best characterized by William Otterbein's expression that it was to be an "unpartisan" (*unparteiisch*) Brotherhood in Christ. This irenic temper, in which Otterbein had been nurtured in Herborn, conditioned the manner in which theology was articulated in word and in life among the early United Brethren.

Its distinctiveness begins to appear as the early *Confession* is compared with its later revisions. Emerging from our in-depth study of the alteration of the early German text, it is now evident that the changes in content and expression which occurred as early as 1815 were in no way "minor changes of no great significance" as Drury had summarily concluded.⁴⁹ Instead, they possibly reflected more basic doctrinal matters than did the new *Confession* of 1889, which led in part to a painful schism in the denomination.⁵⁰ Although these changes in the early *Confession* frequently obscured the visible influence of themes deriving from earlier Reformed Pietism, they also reflect a fluid, dynamic era in the life of the movement in which the issues of faith and order were widely and extensively discussed in the conferences of the Brotherhood.

Not only do the early revisions of the *Confession* tend to detach it from its Reformed roots; they also were inclined to render its formulation of the faith more akin to the Articles of Faith of the Evangelical Association and the Articles of Religion in Methodism. To be sure, the "middle period" (1833-1889) was not a time of significant sentiment for church union with these bodies, but this growing doctrinal kinship would seem to be a natural occurrence at a time when the United

Brethren were acquiring a more definite connectional system *vis-a-vis* the Methodist model. The Evangelicals had a more Methodist-like doctrinal statement and discipline from their outset, since their Articles of Faith were in large measure based on Ignatius Roemer's German translation of John Wesley's *Twenty Five Articles of Religion*, with the addition of an article on the Last Judgment that was likely derived from the *Augsburg Confession*.⁵¹ Wesley's document was a twenty-four article abridgement of the *Thirty Nine Articles* of the Church of England, plus a loyalty article to the American nation.

The major points of difference between the early United Brethren *Confession* and its Evangelical and Methodist counterparts can be summarized as follows. The one is short and compact, consisting of seven paragraphs. It reads more as a narrative, reciting the events of God's saving activity with the human race, stemming from its reliance upon Reformed Pietism and especially Cocceian biblical thought, with its covenantal mode of theologizing. The other documents present the faith in a declarative, third-person fashion and not in a first-person, confessional sense. Being more scholastic in tenor, they make greater use of the substantial metaphysics of the early Greek Fathers, who were concerned with defining the essence of God and man as an ontological undergirding for the biblical faith.

The recovery of the vision of the early *Confession* may hopefully raise the possibility of its transformed influence today. It embodied the piety of those who lived a concrete existence, close to nature and the harshness of an often unfriendly English cultural hegemony.⁵² Its language was also vernacular, concrete, and even poetic in its style, with no apparent inconsistency between their vital piety and the only language they knew. As a theological formulation, it was not critical, sustained, or dominating; rather, it narrated a spirituality that was intimately in touch with the wisdom of a lived Christian piety and whose service it commended. While it did not busy itself with a rational defense of an abstract "Arminianism,"⁵³ the *Confession* affirmed concretely that Christ's work was available to all on the same basis and that it might be experienced as participation in a new, "unpartisan" *Gemeinde*. As a manifesto of "New Pietism" transformed by the American Revolutionary epoch, it embodied a living protest against the artificiality of the rationalist theology and served as a vehicle for adjusting the "requirements of orthodoxy to the demands made by intensity, diversity, and the liberation experienced in Christ."⁵⁴

Notes

1. E.g., Article III on the Holy Spirit follows the tripartite order of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, upon which the old *Confession* also relied. "(The Spirit) convinces the world of sin,....He leads men through faithful response to the gospel into the fellowship of the church

(the work of redemption). He comforts, sustains, and empowers the faithful and guides them into all truth (the life of faith)." "Comfort" is the soteriological mode in which the doctrine of election is presented in the tradition of the *Catechism*, which is reflected in the United Brethren *Confession of Faith*. See *The Discipline of the Evangelical United Brethren Church* (Dayton, Ohio: The Board of Publication, The E.U.B. Church, 1963), p. 26.

2. John Lawrence, *History of the United Brethren Church* (Dayton: United Brethren Publishing House, 1868), p. 80 f., placed the *Confession* in an anti-Reformed, "Waldensian" tradition; A.W. Drury, *History of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ* (Dayton: Otterbein Press, 1924), believed that the *Confession* was of a later origin than Otterbein's Baltimore Conference of 1789, but he provided no evidence to verify this (see p. 275 ff.).

3. See Arthur Core, *Philip William Otterbein: Pastor, Ecumenist* (Dayton: E.U.B. Board of Publication, 1968), p. 109 ff.

4. Among the favorite "rationalist" catechetical works which gained prominence was written by the Cartesian, Solomon Van Til, in the eighteenth century. See Heinrich Graffman, "Die Erklärung des Heidelberger Katechismus in Predigt und Unterricht des 16. bis 18. Jhrhds," p. 77; in *Handbuch zum Heidelberger Katechismus* (Duisburg: Lothar-Coenen, 1963).

5. Walter Hollweg, *Neue Untersuchung zur Geschichte und Lehre des Heidelberger Katechismus*, 2 Folge. (Lemgo, 1968), p. 12.

6. Duisburg: Helwing, 1800; (and) Lemgo: Meyer, 1803; and *Unterweisung in der Christlichen Religion nach dem Heidelbergischen Katechismus*. (Zweyte Auflage, Frankfurt: Julicher, n.d. [1788?]). On page vi of Volume 2 of the first work, Philip Wilhelm Otterbein, "Prediger zu Baltimore in Amerika," is listed as having taken 50 volumes of this work (vol. 1?) for distribution in America.

7. In this way, William's brothers, especially Georg, had an indirect role in the emergence of the United Brethren which has not heretofore been acknowledged.

8. Much of this sectarian ferment centered around the activities of the Seventh Day Baptists at Ephrata, Pa., as documented in Julius Sachse, *The German Sectarians of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Stockhausen, 1899).

9. Sidney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale, 1972), p. 242.

10. See J. Steven O'Malley, *Pilgrimage of Faith: The Legacy of the Otterbeins* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1973), chapter 7.

11. "Letter Concerning the Millennium" by P.W. Otterbein, (N.D.); quoted in Core, p. 102.

12. This manuscript version was published by Drury, p. 3.

13. The *Schleitheim Confession* was published in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* XIX, 4 (October, 1945); 247-253.

14. Different ages of subjects for baptism were also recognized to accommodate both Reformed and Mennonite practice.

15. "...geprediget und verkündigt werden sollte." (Art. 5, pre-1815 text.)

16. See the *Journal of Christian Newcomer*, edited by S.S. Hough (Dayton: U.B. Board of Publications, 1941).

17. Rule 14 of the *Constitution* read "No preacher can stay with us who will not, to the best of his ability, care for the various churches in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, which churches, under the superintendence of William Otterbein, stand in fraternal unity with us." (Cited in Core, p. 112).

18. See Sem C. Sutter, "Mennonites and the Pennsylvania-German Revival," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, L, 1(January, 1976):49 ff.
19. Lawrence, II, p. 180 ff.
20. This theme is suggested in the last clause of Article 3.
21. Christian Burkholder, *Anrede an die Jugend* (Ephrata, Pa.: Bauman u. Cleim, 1804); cited in Suter, p. 50 f.
22. Ibid.
23. A. W. Drury, ed. *Disciplines of the United Brethren in Christ, 1814-41* (Dayton: U. B. Publishing House, 1895) Part II, p. 4.
24. See Matthew Spinka, *John Amos Comenius: That Incomparable Moravian* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943).
25. Lawrence, part 1, ch. 1-6.
26. See Lawrence, especially part 2, ch. 2 and 3. He failed to see that many of Otterbein's Pietist innovations, such as his use of conventicles, had been indigenous to the Reformed heritage.
27. Spinka, p. 27 f.
28. Ibid., p. 142.
29. Otterbein responded in 1752 to the call of Michael Schlatter to become one of six missionary recruits of the Dutch Reformed Church to the American colonies. Comenius had left Herborn in 1613 and, after a study tour in Heidelberg, began his missionary career in Bohemia.
30. Otterbein expressed disapproval of the doctrine of double predestination, which was part of the decrees of Dort (though not contained in the *Heidelberg Catechism*) in a letter addressed in 1788 to the deputies of the Synod in Holland; See Core, p. 100. Otterbein, however, nowhere referred to his position as "Arminian," as did Wesley. However, his view had evolved from the Cocceian, "federal" theology that had prevailed at Herborn and was still, in political terms, regarded by the Dutch authorities as "orthodox."
31. Drury, Part 11, p. 4.
32. This is a concept Otterbein used in a published sermon from 1763, entitled "*Die Heilbringende Menschwerdung...*"; see Core, p. 77 ff; he uses this exact phrase in a letter concerning the millenium (n.d.), found in Core, p. 103.
33. Otterbein, p. 111 f.
34. See J. Steven O'Malley, *Pilgrimage of Faith* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1973), Ch. 2A.
35. Friedrich Adolph Lampe, *Geheimnis des Gnadenbundes* (Bremen: Saueremann, 1748), IV, p. 124.
36. "...dass alle Menschen durch ihn seelig werden können."-Supra, p. 4.
37. The 1815 text, which is continued in the major revision of 1889, reads, "...if they with faith in Him accept the grace proffered in Jesus." ("*Wenn sie die in Jesus angebotene Gnade im Glauben an ihn annehmen.*") Drury, p. 12.
38. Italics mine.
39. "*Dass wir durch ihn erleuchtet, durch den Glauben gerechtfertigt und geheiligt werden.*" Supra, p. 11 f.
40. "*Wir glauben an eine heilige Gemeinde, Gemeinschaft der Heiligen, Auferstehung des Fleisches und ein ewiges Leben.*" Ibid., p. 12.

41. Georg Gottfried Otterbein, *Predigten über den Heiderbergischen Katechismus* (Erster Theil, Duisburg: Helwing Buchhandlung, 1800), I, p. 45; It was the Swiss Pietist, Christoph Stähelin, who made fullest use of the *Himmelsleiter* theme: "Here, dear reader, you have, as it were, a ladder to heaven with three rungs. If you would use it to reach heaven, then you must step on each of the three rungs and not step over any one of them."—from his *Catechetischer Hauss-Schatz* (1737), cited in O'Malley, p. 98.
42. *Predigten*, I, p. 40 ff.
43. Johann Daniel Otterbein, *Jesus und die Kraft seines Bluts...* (Lancaster: Neue Buchdruckerey, 1790).
44. Georg G. Otterbein, *Lesebuch für Deutsche Schulkinder* (Philadelphia: Cist, 1790).
45. O'Malley, chapter 7.
46. See Article 5 of the *Confession* of 1889; quoted in the 1959 *E. U. B. Discipline* (Dayton: E. U. B. Board of Publication, 1959), p. 22.
47. Italics mine. "...die sollen nach dem Befehl des Herrn Jesu, unter seinen Kindern geübt werden..." (1815 text); This is made even stronger in the 1817 revision: "...His children are especially obligated to use the outer means of grace."
48. "...die Art und Weise soll aber einem jeden nach seiner Erkenntniss überlassen werden." (1815 text.)
49. Drury, *History*, p. 319.
50. In 1889, the minority party left to form the "Church of the United Brethren in Christ, Old Constitution" which numbered about 20,000.
51. See the text of the Articles of Faith in the 1959 *E. U. B. Discipline*, p. 23-31. It is possible, as James Stein has suggested, that the noticeable changes between 1814 and 1815 were occasioned in part by the forthcoming "social conference" of 1817, when an equal number of Evangelical and United Brethren preachers met to discuss organic union.
52. For these insights I am indebted to Richard E. Wentz, "The American Character of the American Revolution: A Pennsylvania-German Sampler," in the *Journal* of the American Academy of Religion, xliv, 1 (May, 1976): 118 ff.
53. As was the case with leading Methodist apologists, such as Fletcher and Miley.
54. This is Wentz' summation of the core of Pennsylvania-German Pietism, p. 130.